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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. Apparatus for levitating a magnetic element, the apparatus comprising:
 - 5 at least two magnets arranged to generate a static magnetic field providing a position-dependent potential energy of interaction with a magnetic element, the static magnetic field providing an equilibrium location wherein the potential energy decreases for displacements of the magnetic element away from the equilibrium location along an unstable axis and increases for
10 displacements of the magnetic element away from the equilibrium location in any direction perpendicular to the unstable axis;
a position sensor generating a feedback signal indicative of the location of the magnetic element on the unstable axis;
 - 15 an electromagnet configured to generate a control magnetic field upon the passage of an electrical current through the electromagnet, the control magnetic field having a gradient with respect to displacements along the unstable axis at the equilibrium location; and,
 - 20 a controller connected to receive the feedback signal and to control the electrical current in the electromagnet to prevent the magnetic element from leaving a vicinity of the equilibrium location.
- 25 2. An apparatus according to claim 1 wherein the electromagnet comprises at least two coils spaced along an axis parallel to the unstable axis.

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3. An apparatus according to claim 2 wherein the at least two coils are rectangular coils having long sides extending transversely to the unstable axis.
- 5 4. An apparatus according to claim 2 wherein the electromagnet comprises four coils spaced along an axis parallel to the unstable axis wherein upon the passage of the electrical current through the four coils each of the four coils has a magnetic polarity opposite to the magnetic polarity of adjacent ones of the four coils.
- 10 5. An apparatus according to claim 2 wherein the electromagnet comprises four coils spaced along an axis parallel to the unstable axis, the four coils comprising first and second rectangular coils located between third and fourth rectangular coils wherein, upon
15 the passage of the electrical current through the first through fourth coils, a component of a magnetic field produced by the first and second coils at the equilibrium location is cancelled by a magnetic field produced by the third and fourth coils.
- 20 6. An apparatus according to any one of claims 2 to 5 wherein the coils of the electromagnet are substantially coplanar.
7. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein the
25 electromagnet is configured to generate a quadrupole magnetic field at the equilibrium location upon the passage of the electrical current.

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8. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 7 wherein the at least two magnets comprise first, second, third and fourth magnets arranged in a diamond pattern with the first and second magnets closer together than the third and fourth magnets.

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9. An apparatus according to claim 8 wherein the third and fourth magnets are stronger than the first and second magnets.

10. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 7 wherein the at least two magnets comprise first and second magnets spaced apart from one another by a first distance, $D1$, in a direction parallel to the unstable axis and third and fourth magnets spaced apart from one another by a second distance, $D2$, in a direction transverse to the unstable axis, wherein $D1 < D2$, each of the first and second magnets is equidistant from an axis of symmetry of the at least two magnets and each of the third and fourth magnets is equidistant from the axis of symmetry.

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11. An apparatus according to claim 10 wherein each of the first and second magnets is equidistant from each of the third and fourth magnets.

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12. An apparatus according to claim 10 or 11 wherein each of the first, second, third and fourth magnets has a first magnetic pole facing toward the equilibrium location and a second magnetic pole facing away from the equilibrium location and the first magnetic poles of the first, second, third and fourth magnets are substantially coplanar.

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13. An apparatus according to claim 12 wherein the first magnetic poles of the first, second, third and fourth magnets are substantially coplanar adjacent to a plane extending perpendicular to the symmetry axis.

5 14. An apparatus according to claim 13 wherein the electromagnet comprises at least two coils lying parallel to and adjacent the plane.

15. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 14 wherein the at least two magnets comprise permanent magnets.

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16. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 14 wherein the at least two magnets are all permanent magnets.

17. An apparatus according to any one of claims 10 to 14 wherein the
15 electromagnet comprises at least two coils spaced along an axis parallel to the unstable axis and a first one of the at least two coils extends around the first magnet and a second one of the at least two coils extends around the second magnet.

20 18. An apparatus according to claim 17 where the at least two coils of the electromagnet each have a width WI along the axis parallel to the unstable axis equal to an equilibrium height $D3$, wherein the equilibrium height $D3$ is a distance between the equilibrium position and a plane passing through the at least two coils.

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19. An apparatus according to claim 18 comprising third and fourth coils positioned along the axis parallel to the unstable axis on either side of

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19. An apparatus according to claim 18 comprising third and fourth coils positioned along the axis parallel to the unstable axis on either side of and adjacent to the first and second coils, the third and fourth coils having have widths *W2* at least equal to width *W1* of the first and second
5 coils.
20. An apparatus according to claim 17 wherein the third and fourth permanent magnets are both located outside of any of the at least two
10 coils.
21. An apparatus according to any of claims 17 to 20 wherein the at least two coils comprise rectangular coils.
22. An apparatus according to any of claims 17 to 20 wherein the at
15 least two coils comprise semi-circular coils.
23. An apparatus according to any of claims 17 to 20 wherein the at least two coils comprise triangular coils.
- 20 24. An apparatus according to claim 12 wherein the first, second, third and fourth magnets are positioned such that a line passing through the first and second magnetic poles of each of the first, second, third and fourth magnets intersects and forms an acute angle with the axis of
25 symmetry.
25. An apparatus according to any one of claims 8 to 24 wherein the first, second, third and fourth permanent magnets are permanent magnets

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selected from the group consisting of NdFeB, Barium Ferrite, Samarium Cobalt and AlNiCo magnets.

26. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 25 comprising an
5 arrangement of field reinforcing magnets positioned to generate a magnetic field which has substantially no gradient at the equilibrium location and which augments the static magnetic field near the equilibrium position.

10 27. An apparatus according to claim 26 wherein the arrangement of field reinforcing magnets comprises at least three magnetic dipoles spaced apart to form a ring.

28. An apparatus according to claim 27 wherein the at least three
15 magnetic dipoles comprise at least three permanent magnets spaced apart to form the ring.

29. An apparatus according to claim 27 wherein the arrangement of
field reinforcing magnets comprises a secondary electromagnet.

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30. An apparatus according to claim 29 comprising a secondary
controller for controlling an electrical current through the secondary
electromagnet and a secondary sensor for generating a feedback signal
indicative of a distance of the magnetic element from a plane passing
25 through the secondary electromagnet.

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31. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 30 comprising a transmitting coil connected to a source of alternating current having a frequency in excess of 10 kHz wherein the magnetic element comprises a receiving coil and an electrical device powered by electrical current
5 induced in the receiving coil.
32. An apparatus according to claim 31 wherein the electrical device comprises a rectifier connected to supply direct current to a motor.
- 10 33. An apparatus according to claim 31 wherein the electrical device comprises a lamp.
34. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 33 comprising a light source oriented to direct a beam of light at a light receptor on the
15 magnetic element wherein the magnetic element comprises an optical system for directing light from the light receptor to one or more visible locations on the magnetic element.
35. An application according to any one of claims 1 to 34 comprising
20 a support moveable between an first position in which the support supports the magnetic element approximately at the equilibrium location, and a second position in which the support is out of the way of the equilibrium location.
- 25 36. An apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 35 comprising a secondary electromagnet disposed to apply a force to the levitated magnetic element.

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37. Apparatus for levitating a magnetic element, the apparatus comprising:

5 means for generating a static magnetic field providing a position-dependent potential energy of interaction with a magnetic element, the static magnetic field providing an equilibrium location wherein the potential energy decreases for displacements of the magnetic element away from the equilibrium location along
10 an unstable axis and increases for displacements of the magnetic element away from the equilibrium location in any direction perpendicular to the unstable axis;

means for generating a feedback signal indicative of the location of the magnetic element on the unstable axis;

15 control means for directing the magnetic element to the equilibrium location by providing a quadrupole control magnetic field at the equilibrium location in response to the feedback signal.

38. A method for levitating a magnetic element at an equilibrium
20 location, the method comprising:

providing a static magnetic field providing a position-dependent potential energy of interaction with a magnetic element, the static magnetic field providing an equilibrium location wherein the potential energy decreases for displacements of the magnetic
25 element away from the equilibrium location along an unstable axis and increases for displacements of the magnetic element away

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from the equilibrium location in any direction perpendicular to the unstable axis;

generating a feedback signal indicative of the location of the magnetic element on the unstable axis;

5 forcing the magnetic element toward the equilibrium location by providing a quadrupole control magnetic field at the equilibrium location in response to the feedback signal.

39. Apparatus for levitating a magnetic element, the apparatus
10 comprising:

 at least two magnets arranged to generate a static magnetic field providing a position-dependent potential energy of interaction with a magnetic element, the static magnetic field providing an equilibrium location wherein the potential energy
15 decreases for displacements of the magnetic element away from the equilibrium location along an unstable axis and increases for displacements of the magnetic element away from the equilibrium location in any direction perpendicular to the unstable axis, the at least two magnets comprising first and second magnets spaced
20 apart from one another by a first distance, $D1$, in a direction parallel to the unstable axis and third and fourth magnets spaced apart from one another by a second distance, $D2$, in a direction perpendicular to the unstable axis, wherein $D1 < D2$ and each of the first and second magnets and each of the third and fourth magnets
25 is equidistant from the axis of symmetry;

 a position sensor generating a feedback signal indicative of the location of the magnetic element on the unstable axis; and,

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a controller connected to receive the feedback signal and to control a means for applying a controllable force to the magnetic element to direct the magnetic element to the equilibrium location.

- 5 40. Apparatus for levitating a magnetic element, the apparatus comprising:

at least two magnets arranged to generate a static magnetic field providing a position-dependent potential energy of interaction with a magnetic element, the static magnetic field providing an equilibrium
10 location wherein the potential energy decreases for displacements of the magnetic element away from the equilibrium location along an unstable axis and increases for displacements of the magnetic element away from the equilibrium location in any direction perpendicular to the unstable axis, the at least two magnets comprising at least two magnetic dipoles
15 spaced apart around a ring, the at least two magnetic dipoles providing a magnetic field component having substantially no gradient at the equilibrium location;

a position sensor generating a feedback signal indicative of the location of the magnetic element on the unstable axis; and,

- 20 a controller connected to receive the feedback signal and to control a means for applying a controllable force to the magnetic element to direct the magnetic element to the equilibrium location.

41. Apparatus having any new, useful and inventive feature,
25 combination of features or subcombination of features described herein whether or not otherwise claimed.

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42. Methods having any new, useful and inventive step, act, combination of steps and/or acts, or subcombination of steps and/or acts described herein whether or not otherwise claimed.